The Play, "Abraham Lincoln"

By BARRETT H. CLARK.

JOHN DRINKWATER'S *Abraham Lincoln* is just the sort of play that ought to have been written by an American; it would have been fitting. The only trouble is that there was no American that would—or could, perhaps?—do it. Percy MacKaye, to be sure, has shown that he is quite as capable as John Drinkwater of writing a fine play about a great American, but even Mr. MacKaye would, I feel, have failed, or rather refused, to condense his material so to fit the rather narrow limits prescribed by the English poet. Mr. MacKaye seems at his best in the pageant form, and we ought to rest content with *Washington, the Man Who Made Us*, surely one of the finest historical plays—or whatever you choose to term it—of this generation.

But possibly it took an Englishman, endowed with at least a historical sympathy with America, to bring to his subject that aloofness, that spiritual detachment which Galsworthy laid down as one of the necessary attributes to the ideal dramatist. The hypothetical American author of the Lincoln play which was never written would, of course, have created a local color more in keeping with the facts, and observed perhaps a stricter adherence to historical incident. I can imagine Joseph Hergesheimer building up about his character of Lincoln a host of enlightening and interesting details. But for such a work as Mr. Drinkwater proposed to himself there is no need for this sort of thing, appropriate as it may be in its proper place. Just as there is need for photographing the White House in a Lincoln picture.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Drinkwater's play is happily unhampered by the minutiæ of historical fact. He has conceived his subject greatly; he has thrown himself into the epic frame of mind, consciously disregarding the episodic and the transitory. The choruses which divide the scenes, and which introduce and close the play, are the lyrical echo of his epic inspiration. They at once take the play out of the realm of the casual, almost out of the cycle of time itself. Whether consciously or not, he has followed Shakespeare, the Shakespeare of that other hero play, *Henry V.*

The opening *Chorus* transports us away from the immediacy of our interests, puts us into a frame of mind that is larger and freer than that of our daily round; even the story of Lincoln as we know it, is wrapped in a haze of romance that is at first almost disconcerting. The Lincoln parlor at Springfield is carried over into an imaginary province, where high deeds and thoughts are presented to us as through the refracting glass of a transfigured past.

The *Chorus* opens with

"Kinsman, you shall behold
Our stage, in mimic action, mould
A man's character.

"This is the wonder, always, everywhere—
Not that vast mutability which is event,
The pits and pinnacles of change,
But man's desire and valiance that range
All circumstance, and come to port unspent.

"Agents are these events, these ecstasies,
And tribulations, to prove the purities
Of poor oblivions that are our being.
When
Beauty and peace possess us, they are none
But as they touch the beauty and peace of men,
Nor, when our days are done,
And the last utterance of doom must fall,
Is the doom anything
Memorable for its apparelling;
The bearing of man facing it is all."

It is the spirit of this *Chorus* that lifts *Abraham Lincoln* above the level of even the finest sort of purely naturalistic play that could have been written on the same subject. These lyric and epic interludes are continually urging the dramatic episodes aloft into the regions where the poet has conceived his theme. I must quote one other passage from strophic and antistrophic interlude following the second scene. This is more serenely lyric in character than the others. It opens with

"You who have gone gathering
Cornflowers and meadowsweet,
Heard the hazels glancing down
On September eves,
Seen the homeward rooks on wing
Over fields of golden wheat,
And the silver cups that crown
Water-lily leaves——"

The whole long passage closes with a brief narrative note:

"He goes
The way of dominion in pitiful, high-hearted fashion."

Abraham Lincoln is in form a pure chronicle play; there is no plot to speak of; only a sequence of scenes knitted together by the dominating figure of Lincoln. These scenes include the acceptance of the nomination in 1860 the outbreak of the war, the Emancipation Proclamation, Lee's surrender and the assassination in 1865.

Barring a very few minor details—such as the negro's absurd Fenimore-Cooper-Indian accent, and a slight deviation from historical facts—*Abraham Lincoln* is a work that cannot but appeal to Americans, primarily as an effective play about a man who is peculiarly sympathetic to us all. It is much more besides, but we can safely leave the poetic implications of Mr. Drinkwater to the future, and rest content with a play that is surely one of the finest of our time.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN. A Play. By JOHN DRINKWATER. With an introduction by Arnold Bennett. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

FRANK N. DOUBLEDAY has the largest waste basket in existence. It is the size of one of those jars in which the characters hid in the story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Mr. Doubleday has to have it emptied twice daily, so fast does it fill with the projects of people who, as he once said, want him to have the courage of their convictions.

SCENE: Book shop, not Chris Morley's haunted one either. Enter Guy Holt. Tableau with catalogue. Voice, reading title: *"The New Decameron.* That sounds int'restin', but say—I thought this guy Bo Cash was dead!"

Albania Asks Fair Play

THE world's knowledge of Albania has come largely from books by French, Italian or English writers. Réné Pinon has discussed interestingly the political aspects of the Albanian question and Miss M. E. Durham has written with much understanding and warm sympathy of the Albanian people and their struggle for freedom and a national life.

But they saw Albania through the eyes of a French scholar and an English woman, and if their impressions savor of their own national bias it would be scarcely more than could be expected. In a question so inherently puzzling these sincere variations of opinion may have offered to the general reader no definite solution but have rather increased his difficulty of unravelling its perplexities and complications. In *Albania, Past and Present*, by Constantine A. Chekrezi, we have, however, a book on Albania by an Albanian, the first that has appeared in the English language.

There must always have been an Albanian question in Europe, for the Albanians are very generally recognized as the most ancient race in southeastern Europe. "They are descendants," says Mr. Chekrezi, "of the earliest Aryan immigrants who were represented in historical times by the kindred Illyrian Macedonians and Epirots."

The Albanian history is a story of centuries of struggles, first against their more numerous and powerful neighbors the Slavs and then against their Turkish conquerors, to maintain their existence as an individual people and a nation. They reached the highest point of independence in the time of their national hero, George Castriota, whose conquest of his native land by the defeat of its Turkish oppressors is so graphically and dramatically told by Longfellow in his poem "Scanderbeg."

Anon from the castle walls
The crescent banner falls
And the crowd beholds instead,
Like a portent in the sky,
Iskander's banner fly,
The Black Eagle with double head.

It is the sorrow of the nation that the great Scanderbeg left no worthy successors and that the banner of the double headed black eagle remained unfurled for centuries.

Throughout the years of Turkish domination the Albanians preserved their peculiar characteristics, customs, language and national traditions. The "blood feuds" of the northern tribes, so frequently referred to by travellers, are a survival of feudalism that enforced justice in a country where there was no just government. It protected the weak and it developed a high sense of chivalry in the treatment of women. "A man who would injure, offend or kill a woman or any member of the rest of the company under her protection is treated as the vilest coward, and there is no possible expiation for his crime." The karass at most of the foreign embassies in Constantinople and at the chief consulates in the Near East were generally Albanians, because they could be trusted; old Abdul Hamid surrounded himself with Albanian guards because they were unfailingly faithful to a duty which they accepted.

The Albanians never abandoned the struggle for freedom. Thousands were killed in revolutionary movements, and hundreds emigrated to escape Turkish oppression. It was in the Albanian mountains that the revolution which overthrew Abdul Hamid had its inception and many of the leaders of the movement were Albanians. When the Young Turks failed to keep their promises of equal rights to all Ottoman subjects it was the Albanians who by their struggle for independence began the Balkan war of 1912, which lifted the Turkish yoke from Macedonia and Thrace.

When the Albanian question appeared before the Congress of Berlin in 1878 Bismarck bluntly dismissed it by saying "There is no Albanian nationality." Had he lived he might have added this mistake to the others that he made in dealing with the Balkans. There was then as distinct an Albanian nationality as there was a Serb, Greek or Bulgar; Albania was merely "the last of the Balkan States to emerge from the blight of five centuries of unconscionable Turkish oppression." In 1912 the Albanian question had become one of absorbing interest and, when a government was set up for these mountaineers and William of Wied, a small German Prince, was put at its head, Europe complacently breathed a sigh of relief and thanked heaven that matter was disposed of at last.

But the chancelleries of Europe knew differently. They knew that William of Wied was not selected by the Powers, but by Austria, principally because she saw that by sending a boy to do a man's job there could be no definite settlement and that the whole question would again resolve itself into its former status of a dispute between Austria and Italy. After the Albanians had endured conditions as long as possible they arose to demand an explanation. The Prince fled with his wife and children to a yacht which he always had in readiness just over the garden wall.

"There," said Europe, "Albania has had its chance and failed. There is no use to try to set up a government for those wild people."

But was this really true? The Prince by his flight—on hearing of it the military club of Potsdam expunged his name from the records of its members—proved himself to the Albanians guilty of cowardice, the most despicable of all offences in the eyes of a brave mountain people.

Mr. Chekrezi, who was secretary of the international commission of control and carried on the negotiations with the rebellious Albanians, says that the Prince committed a still graver offence against the customs of the country. The Prince had come to Albania under the most sacred agreement that the Albanians could enter into, a *besa* or a mutual pledge of good faith. By his flight he showed a mistrust of the Albanian honor and by his acts he broke the *besa*. The day after his flight he returned to his capital and rode unattended out to meet his rebellious subjects. They had only contempt for him—"they could not recognize him as their lawful ruler." Most of the world that knows the inside story of this experiment in government will agree that the Albanians did not have a square deal. And that is all that they are asking now.

ALBANIA, PAST AND PRESENT. By CONSTANTINE A. CHEKREZI. The Macmillan Company.